

WWF's Ventura may be taking the highway

This past weekend, on NBC's Saturday Night's Main Event, Vince McMahon and broadcast partner Jesse (The Body) Ventura spent much of the show talking about the biggest story in wrestling — the return of Hulk Hogan.

But behind the scenes there was something that neither mentioned on the air. Saturday's broadcast may be the final NBC special with the McMahon-Ventura announcing team.

Ventura, 39, quit the World Wrestling Federation shortly after the SNME special and three weeks worth of syndication programs were taped on July 16 in Omaha.

Those close to Ventura say his major reason for leaving is a dispute with McMahon, who doubles as owner of the WWF. Ventura apparently was offered a video game deal. McMahon, who has a similar deal with Nintendo, felt the product would be competition for his game and wouldn't let Ventura accept the offer. Ventura felt strongly enough about taking the offer that he was willing to leave the WWF.

Ventura wrestled for 11 years before making his name as a broadcaster. While he wasn't the first to do it, he defined and became the prototype of the "heel commentator" — a villain color man who constantly disagrees with the straightman host (in his case, McMahon).

His exposure as an announcer on the WWF syndicated package as well as the bimonthly NBC specials opened other acting and broadcasting doors. Ventura landed roles in the Arnold Schwarzenegger films "Running Man" and "Predator," and became a radio voice for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Next month he starts filming the ABC-TV series "Tag Team," in which he and Roddy Piper co-star as former wrestlers who become undercover officers. The show is slated as a midseason replacement.

Ventura's last Superstars of Wrestling broadcast should air the weekend of Aug. 11. According to WWF officials, a replacement may be on board as early as September.



**GRUNT
AND
GRIN**

BY DAVE MELTZER
FOR THE NATIONAL

FILE: Hulk Hogan's wife Linda gave birth to the couple's second child on Friday. The 8-pound, 2-ounce boy was named Nicholas. Hogan only wrestled two matches in the past three months as the WWF expertly created an injury angle with Earthquake to explain Hogan's summer absence and hype a grudge rematch at its Summer Slam pay-per-view event. . . . Mr. Perfect returned to action Friday night after missing nine days following a bar room brawl in Sauget, Ill., a St. Louis suburb. Perfect was hit in the head with a bar stool and needed 21 stitches. The brawl was allegedly started by wrestler Haku, who was arrested on charges of battery and resisting arrest.

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